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ODD NUMBERS

By DUM-DUM

LONDON

CONSTABLE AND COMPANY LTD

1913

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TO
MY LADY

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

MOST of these pieces have appeared in the columns of Mr. Punch. For permission to reprint them I am indebted to the courtesy of Messrs. Bradbury and Agnew. They have, of course, been overhauled.

The other pieces are new.

JOHN KENDALL.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ON THE PORTRAIT OF A FRIEND,	I
ART FOR ART'S SAKE,	4
CIRCUMSTANCE WITHOUT POMP,	7
TO AN ORANG-OUTANG,	10
TO MILKMAIDS—IN SCARCITY,	12
PICTURES OF LOVE,	14
A LOVE-SONG,	17
AN OLD BALL,	20
TO THE PAVILION CLOCK,	24
NUTS IN MAY,	27
ON DELIA—GOING TO BATHE,	29
IN THE CART,	32
A TIMELY REMINDER,	34
THE POET AND THE BOY,	35
MR COX,	39
NATURAL SNOBBERY,	41
LINES ON A DEAD BICYCLE,	44
A LEAP YEAR QUESTION,	47
THE CORONATION CHAIR,	50

	PAGE
WEARY POULTRY,	53
A CENTENARY OF PROGRESS,	56
A KERCHIEF,	59
WITHOUT PREJUDICE,	62
MUTED,	64
A LAUNDRY PROBLEM,	67
AN INSTALLATION,	69
TO A HAIRPIN,	71
LINES ON SEEING SOME CORONETS DISPLAYED IN A SHOP WINDOW,	73
ERGOPHOBIA,	76
THE POET AND THE BURGLAR,	81

ON THE PORTRAIT OF A FRIEND

WHEN all the world is cold and dark without,
When through a window that is far from clean
The solemn day peers in as though in doubt—
He that of late so buoyant was of mien—
As to his very fitness to be seen ;
When London fog, and skies of London grey,
Recall the golden splendour that has been,
And the sick bard reflects, with strong dismay,
That here he is for good, and here he has to stay ;

Then, when the gates of light are wholly blocked,
My fragile soul, accustomed to a peak
Of clear empyreal air, is straightly knocked
Into the glooming middle of next week.
Darkling I gaze around, and darkling seek
Some helpful charm these wintry woes to end,
Vainly, until, with sudden-brightening cheek,
I turn to thee, O Portrait of my Friend,
And slowly all grows clear, and things begin to
mend.

On a most mellow lawn, within a chair
Of pleasing comfort, placid as a lord
He sits ; a purple haze is on the air,
Borne from his pipe : umbrageous elms afford
A comely shelter for the shaven sward ;
Pensive he sits ; a book is on his knee.
Ah, happy book, he is not looking bored ;
Doubtless his musings are inspired by thee
Partly, and partly by th' approaching hour of tea.

And, gazing with rapt eyes, I am withdrawn
Into a pleasant land of summer ease.
Methinks I stand upon a flower-fringed lawn ;
Roses commingle on a lightsome breeze
With the choice weed ; the lazy hum of bees
The song of sleepy birds, entrance my sprite ;
All is cool air, clear skies, and kindly trees
That shed a shadowy rapture—different, quite,
From the depressing weight of town's material blight.

O cool, calm shape, sit on. Thy fragrant pipe
For ever shalt thou smoke, and not consume.
For thee shall summer be for ever ripe,
The sky be fair, nor waning seasons doom
Thy fancy suiting to a wintry tomb.

ON THE PORTRAIT OF A FRIEND 3

Fair youth, beneath thine elms, thou canst not
know

The awful deeps of London's heavy gloom ;
But be it thine, when I am bored and low,
To waft me hence, as now, for some half-hour or so.

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

LET the maiden of ambition listen well
While I tell
Of a lady who arose to sudden fame
From a wild desire to shine
In the literary line ;
She is quite a friend of mine,
All the same.

Knowing nothing of the labour of the pen,
There and then
She determined, in a sunny way she had,
That she never would depart
From the highest form of Art,
Which, considered as a start,
Wasn't bad.

Much uplifted by that laudable intent,
Off she went
To attain to fame and fortune at a stroke,

And in time produced a book
Which the public wouldn't look
At, and all the critics took
As a joke.

Did she cry aloud in horror? Did she tear
Off her hair?
Did the disappointment stab her like a dart?
Not a bit of it. She said,
She was far above the head
Of a mob who never read
Works of Art.

As an Artist, to be slighted by the crowd
Made her proud;
And she begged to be permitted to suggest
That, before she sank as low
As—she mentioned So-and-so—
Popularity could go
And be blessed.

But she made a second effort. And behold
It was sold
By the thousand, by the million! And she struck
(To the undisputed gloom
Of her rivals) on a boom
That should last her to the tomb,
Given luck.

Every year (when Christmas present time is due)
 Something new
Is exuded from her never-failing store ;
 While the sympathetic mob
Takes the money from its fob,
And, with something like a sob,
 Asks for more.

There are cavillers who sneer at her technique
 (Which is weak)
And a style which it is easy to assail,
 But it's credibly averred
That her powers are never stirred
Save at half-a-crown a word,
 On the nail.

And, if questioned on the cause of her success,
 She'll confess
That her victory is merely what she owes
 (Putting genius quite apart)
To the Public's love of Art,
For the Public (bless its heart !)
 Always knows.

CIRCUMSTANCE WITHOUT POMP

THE gale had passed, but chilling was the air,
A simple tramp came wand'ring o'er the hill—
A man of peaceful habit, free from care,
Save that he felt a trifle wet and chill.

Calmly, with equal mind but broken shoe,
Onward he moved, until at length he stood
Where an adjacent haystack met his view
(A crop both scarce and dear, but very good).

This he regarded in a casual way,
Then, finding warmth his prevalent desire,
Drew forth a match and lit the ready hay,
And in a moment had a first-class fire.

And there he basked upon the leeward side,
Till the rude farmer came and raised a storm,
To whose unseemly protests he replied,
Mildly, that he had done it 'for a warm.'

* * * * *

A simple tramp Perchance a simple tale,
But what a greatness ! Surely we have here
A calm, cool mind that knows not how to fail,
A steady brain that sees its purpose clear ,

An elemental soul that gives no heed
To right or wrong—surmounts without a pause
The disproportionate vastness of his deed,
Nor cares the *2d.* that he lacks for laws.

What is a stack ? A barn, a homestead roof—
Whole villages shall flare at his commands ;
Great towns and cities shall be nowise proof
If such an one aspire to warm his hands.

Does he need victual ? Is he void of trust ?
Poultry and flocks his instant needs shall slake ;
Ten thousand fattened beeves shall bite the dust
Ere he go lacking in a modest steak.

Oh, see him ! 'Tis a sight to stir the heart,
Serene of purpose, ready, swift, and bold,
The kingly impulse of a BUONAPARTE
Were less than his, if he is feeling cold.

Yet did men hail him as a demigod,
And raise him up? Ah, no. I grieve to state
That this high soul is languishing in quod,
With three months' hard, for daring to be great.

TO AN ORANG-OUTANG

O SATYR, when I saw you first
Ranging the roof with fourfold grip,
You (being, so to speak, reversed)
Betrayed no mark of cousinship.
I never liked the thought, and I
Was glad to put the matter by.

But when you stood erect of frame,
And stiffly crossed the level stones,
I could no more dispute your claim
To kinship with my old friend, JONES ;
His very gait, his very build !
I'm glad I wasn't left undrilled.

And when I gained a closer view,
Your features, as I gazed thereon,
Betrayed a marked resemblance to
My more than brother, ROBINSON,
Which did imply a common race ;
I'm glad I haven't got that face.

TO AN ORANG-OUTANG

11

But, more than all, your ginger beard,
The rusty carrots on your crown,
Gave you a ludicrously weird
Similitude to dear old BROWN ;
Old BROWN and you would make a pair !
I'm glad I haven't got red hair.

TO MILKMAIDS—IN SCARCITY

[A noticeable feature . . . was the almost entire absence of milkmaids.]

RETURN, O maidens, you that tend the kine
 (Or did so) in the vales of Arcadie,
Return. Bereft of you the homesteads pine.
 The cattle, grazing on the luscious lea,
 Wait for their Mary, having had her tea,
To call them home, and lowingly bewail
Her timely summons to the easeful pail.

Now, too, Damoetas and the shepherd swains
 No more with pretty ribbon deck their crooks ;
No more they take considerable pains
 To wash their faces and improve their looks
 With costumes *à la Watteau*, as in books ;
Nor do they, in their lighter moods, devote
Hours to the practice of the fluty oat.

For you, O maidens, you have gone away ;
 Have gone, and left the uncouth swain small
 chance

To air his graces 'neath the westering day,
 And, with rude relish, thrird the mazy dance.
 The village green is void ; now, with sad glance,
 The local fiddler turns away, to drown
 His idle sorrows at the Cat and Crown.

O Phyllis, Chloe, while you may, return ;
 Nor linger, Daphne ; all the countryside
 Await you. That gay town for which you yearn
 Is not for you. Nay, cold ones, by your pride
 I charge you, is it well to thrust aside
 The crown that men have placed upon your brows
 As the sole women not afraid of cows ?

And oh, bethink you, 'twas this very milk
 (As a complexion-wash) that lent its aid
 To make your faces rosy, soft as silk
 And smooth—and, if it subsequently made
 Butter for us, what matter ? Who's afraid ?
 The veriest cynic would the more enjoy
 That lubricant for its so dear employ.

PICTURES OF LOVE

My Bella is a charming maid,
One of the fairest of earth's creatures,
Brown eyes, brown hair, a trifle staid,
Well off, and with attractive features ;
She is a thing without a taint :
The one fly in my pot of honey
Is that she thinks that she can paint ;
It's very funny.

Truth is an attribute I prize ;
But in the processes of wooing,
When she displayed to my shocked eyes
Some dreadful daub that she was doing,
I praised it warmly on the spot ;
I called it great—but meant to flatter ;
It was a lie, but I did not
Think it would matter.

Nor did it then. But ever since
We told our love (with some emotion)
Fate has inspired her to evince
The breadth and depth of her devotion
With gifts—not goods of silver, gold,
And such—not even an umbrella—
But pictures, awful to behold ;
Oh, Arabella !

I have a ‘ Spring ’ which makes one creep,
‘ Autumn ’ (the trees alone are muddy),
Some things which I believe are sheep,
And something that she calls a ‘ Study,’
‘ Dawn on the sands ’ in fleshly pink,
A pair of blue seas and a green one,
And a weird cow, which makes you think
She’s never seen one.

My humble walls were once bedight
With works of some artistic merit ;
Some bought, because they pleased the sight ;
Some, I was lucky to inherit ;
Those well-loved friends have vanished now ;
Others, with strange and startling faces,
Headed by that infernal cow,
Usurp their places.

It may be, as my friends declare,
I err in being too fastidious,
But can the eye that holds her fair
See that her work is aught but hideous ?
And, tho' I try to bear in mind
The thought that love is blind, or should be,
I am not blind—I can't be blind—
I wish I could be.

And yet, when Bella roams unchecked
About the room where hang those pictures,
And stands, admiring the effect,
I clean forget my private strictures
The simple fact that she is nigh
Seems to improve their aspect vastly ;
It's when the artist isn't by
That they're so ghastly.

A LOVE-SONG

OH, my love, my love ! Would you know what
sort of person my love is ?

Very fair is my love. Her face is like the full moon
on a fine night.

Her features are as rarest verse, perfect in expres-
sion and form ,

Her eyes shame the Mediterranean blue on a picture
post-card ; she is of medium height ,

And her hair is of a rich auburn, so vivid as almost
to be warm.

My love rises in the morning, and the sun immedi-
ately becomes dim ;

She moves in her garden, and the female rose hangs
in shame upon her stalk ;

She trills as she goes, and the blackbird gloomily
confesses that it's one too many for him,

While the peacock may be observed in a secluded
corner trying to copy her walk.

How dainty are the feet of my love—she tells me
that she takes small three's ;

Which (*vide* the peacock) does not interfere with
the unembarrassed freedom of her gait ;

Her arms are like roseate marble, delicately veined in
a manner suggestive of a new Stilton cheese ;

Her le—. But I do not wish to be indelicate.

My love's breath is a breeze laden with all spices of
Araby except muskiness

(O my love, my love, would I could inhale the
fragrance of your sighs !) ;

Her voice I regard as the entire limit—sympathy
without huskiness—

She can say 'Boh !' in a manner to draw tears
from your eyes.

Now that my love is away, I am become a subject
to the gravest apprehension ;

I droop as a lily ; I wilt visibly ; I am as melan-
choly as a Gibraltar cat ;

As for my appetite, I have nothing of the kind about
me worthy of mention,

For fear partly that something may happen to
her, partly that she may meet one comelier
than I (I'm always afraid of that).

But when my love returns (catastrophe barred) I shall
grow giddy, I shall stagger like one overcome
with strong drink ;

And, if she allows me (as I devoutly hope she will)
to fortify myself with an affectionate and
elaborate kiss,

Then will I fall before her little pink toes (at
least, I suppose they're pink)

And I will recite to her these verses ; and that
will indeed be bliss.

AN OLD BALL

A GOLF IDYLL

WELL, you shall have the story of the ball.
It seems a curious trophy, does it not,
To keep among my treasures of the past
In yonder cabinet? Scarred, battered, gashed,
Spoiled with ignoble usage of the club,
Old-fashioned, too—ah me, I had almost
Forgotten it was there. But you shall hear.

I was not ever scratch, as I am now.
Far from it. Through a long novitiate
My golf was vile; and gods, how I could slice!
That was at once my shame and my despair;
Shame, for the dangers that I cast abroad,
Despair of that eternal 'rough,' the time
I spent in looking for the balls I lost,
The money that I lost in losing them,
Not to say, temper.

One wild afternoon
Into a crosswise wind I drave. The ball
Leapt from the tee and swung, like one possessed,
In mad abandonment towards the off,
Where, on a green impossibly remote,
(Or so it seemed) in awkward stance there stood
A maiden putting. Round that fairy form
The strange thing, hissing like a Catherine wheel,
In lessening spiral rushed—against that form
Rudely impinged, and so accosted earth.

And thither, to retrieve that cursed ball,
I, with disarming smile and cap in hand,
A mincing shape of crushed apology,
Approached, and made expressions of remorse
Such as a maid might swallow. Her three friends
Darkly opposed me with a hostile glare ;
But not so she. She heard me to the end ;
Then raised her eyes—eyes of a most deep blue—
And said it didn't matter, and forgave.
So for the nonce I left her. All that round,
I could not keep my mind upon the game,
Or eye upon the ball. Of her I thought,
Her voice, her smile, her pardon, and I played
On with the ball that smote her, hewed and hacked,
And, at the close, 'twas as you see it now.

But when the round had ended in defeat
At the clubhouse I met her, and I learned,
She, too, was a beginner. I proposed
A match, the first of many. Day by day
In pleasing concord of inferior golf
We, being equal in our lack of skill,
Together ploughed the ineffectual sand,
Harrid the sod, and laboured through the rough,
While each in healing sympathy consoled
The other's failures with 'Oh, crushing luck,'
'Hard lines,' and 'Ah, th' abominable lie,'
And all such kindly flatteries, till, at last,
(Both being bunkered at the fourteenth hole)
I told her that I loved her. She was kind.
And in that bunker we became engaged.

So for a pleasant season all was well.
But, of a sudden—how I know not—I
Began to get the better of my ball ;
Put off the novice ; and, of my success,
Was born the baffling magic of the game.
I grew impatient at the loss of time
Spent in retrieving balls from that vile rough
Wherein she sliced them—slicing was her fault,
It was ridiculous—and I began
To pine for foes more worthy of my skill,

To feel some ire at being thus kept back
By an inferior player. I proposed
To give her lessons. She resented that.
Indeed, it bred a coolness ; and, at last,
(She being bunkered at the fourteenth hole)
We had some words, and parted, not in peace.

She sent me back my presents. They were few.
I had not known her long enough for more.
A ring, a dressing-case, a set of clubs,
Some cunning treatises upon the game,
Golf for Beginners, Illustrated Faults,
And others that I gave her for her good ;
And, with the rest, a gashed and battered ball,
My earliest gift, the scarred and sacred thing
Through whose wild office we were introduced.

TO THE PAVILION CLOCK

AT A FOOTBALL MATCH

AROUND the ropes the tumult swayed
On rows of myriad feet,
The stands were packed with those that paid
A shilling for a seat,
And faces blue and faces red,
And wild eyes starting from the head,
Confessed some little heat.

And now from every side arose
Full many a voice to prime
Their friends to newer zeal, their foes
To play the game (or gime),
While sounding threats, extremely free,
To scrag the whistling referee
Assailed the thick sublime.

And I, too, though of sober mood,
Letting my zeal outrun
Discretion, bellowed, howled and booed,
And carried on like fun ;

Till suddenly, thou thing of Awe,
I lifted up my gaze, and saw
Thy face, majestic One.

From thy high gable near the roof
Thou gazed'st on the show
Supremely, icily aloof
From them that raged below ;
While they, with puny fires, waxed hot,
Time's very flight concerned thee not,
Thou didst not even go.

Alone above that purpled crowd
Thy face was all unflushed,
Where every other voice was loud,
Thine, thine alone, was hushed.
There, while the world beneath thee raved,
Thou wert the one thing well-behaved ;
I really felt quite crushed.

And, gazing on thine awful face,
Upon my spirit came
A numbing sense of dull disgrace,
A sudden chill of shame ;
The moments passed unheeded by,
The sport concerned me not, though I
Had money on the game.

In vain I strove to keep my glance
Fixed on that paltry fray ;
Thy grave unsmiling countenance
Seemed somehow to convey
A mute contempt, a settled scorn
Too righteous to be tamely borne---
I had to go away.

NUTS IN MAY

FAIR is the Spring, and fair with pleasant bough
Garden and Park wherein, at day's decline,
The pale solicitor, with bald, bare brow,
Moves homeward, conscious of the shade, to dine ;
Fair is the sward whereon his warm feet stray ;
Yet not so fair as you, O Nuts in May.

See, now the flowers in vernal wealth attire
The florist's window or the public bed ;
The first for purchase, or, in pots, for hire ;
The latter on the rates, 'tis darkly said ;
Sweet, too, are these, whoever has to pay ;
Yet far less sweet than you, O Nuts in May.

Now on the sunlit waters of St. James
The amorous waterfowl begins to make
Fond preparation for his little games,
And burgeons forth, a ripe and valiant drake,
In panoply to shame the orb of Day,
Yet all outpeered by you, O Nuts in May.

For you, O Nuts, you the returning Spring
Clothes freshly ever to the grateful eye ;
The last year's habit, coat and trousering,
The radiance of your former vest and tie,
All these are gone, have faded quite away
From the pure person of the Nut in May.

Changed is the form and fashion of each part.
The crest assumes an unfamiliar block ;
Pale Nature shrinks abashed before the art
That throws a newness o'er the slender sock ;
She can, at best, but don her old array ;
How stale compared with you, O Nuts in May.

Wherefore I hold that, tho' the flowers be fair,
E'en so are you, and no two Springs the same ;
The bravest fowl that swims may not compare
With the new vividness that decks your frame ;
The trees are only green, and, I should say,
That you are every bit as green as they,
O Nuts in May.

•

ON DELIA—GOING TO BATHE

WHEN the sun is warm and high,
When no zephyr blows
Rudely from a tumbled sky,
And my lady Delia goes
Down to brave the limpid sea,
Passing fair, I ween, is she.

You shall find her slender shape
Pleasingly displayed
In a garb of costly crêpe—
Finest cloth and latest shade—
With, perchance, the happy grace
Of some ancient Irish lace.

Over this a chiffon wrap
Flows in various curves ;
While upon her head a cap
(Nothing less than satin) serves
To protect her from the day
And the too insistent spray.

Thus, in part, is Delia clad,
Yet not thus alone ,
Corsets for her figure add
Something that remains their own ;
What it is one cannot tell,
But they seem to do it well.

Yes, but these were not enow.
Pardon if I beg
That, for once, you would allow
Mention of a maiden's leg.
(' Legs ' were better—she has two—
But, in verses, one will do.)

What, then, is my Delia's whim
With regard to these ?
Silken stockings, neat and trim,
Rich and radiant—never limb
Looked so vivid and so slim—
Muse, be steady, if you please.
Coldly let us add, my Muse,
Reference to her satin shoes.

Thus equipped in every sort,
When the weather's fine

Forth my Delia goes to sport,
By the gay and sparkling brine.

* * * * *

At the least approach of rain
In my Delia goes again.

IN THE CART

THE street was full. The noonday traffic swelled
Into full current down its twofold course ,
And, in the midst, I suddenly beheld
An aged and shaggy horse.

Also a cart. A thing by no means strange,
I know, no novelty to warm the heart
To an awed rapture ; but, by way of change,
He was inside the cart.

His eye was calm. In contemplative mien
He watched the hurrying throng without alarm
The freshness of the whole unblinkered scene
Filled him with pensive charm.

The shrilling taxi-hoot did not upset
His marble gravity. Without a pang
He saw the blundering bus's rearward threat
And did not give a hang.

So rapt his gaze, he hardly seemed to hear,
Till, when some stormy Jehu, waxing wild,
Called on his gods, he pricked a conscious ear
And, for a moment, smiled.

But he grew grave, remembering ancient woes ;
And once again a look of bland content
Softened the rigour of his Roman nose,
As on his way he went.

One felt that in his heart he blessed his lord,
Who, having seen him well and truly strive
So long, had hit upon the apt reward
Of giving him a drive.

And I, too, being moved beyond control,
Spake out aloud to an astonished street,
'That horse's lord,' I said, 'is just the soul
That one would like to meet.'

But even as the words were on my tongue
The chariot turned—his amiable regard
Was on me—then, behind, a great gate swung ;
It was a knacker's yard.

A TIMELY REMINDER

DEAR, do you ever think of me,
And of our last brief interview
That day, when it was not quite three,
But after half-past two ?
'Sweet, do you love me ?' soft and low
I murmured—and was promptly met
By an uncompromising 'No'—
Ah love, can you forget ?

Time in his course has healed the blow.
There have been others since ; and yet
I feel, at times, a passing glow
Of not unmixed regret.
And often, when it's not quite three,
But nearer that than half-past two,
I wonder 'Does she think of me ?'—
I'll bet you never do.

THE POET AND THE BOY

‘OH, how shall I travel to Arcadie,
The land that the poets sing,
Where the fairies dwell in a flowery dell
And dance in a fairy ring?

‘Shall I make my trip in a golden train
With ivory tickets and rainbow steam,
And an engine flying with might and main
That doesn’t know how to scream?
And shall I recline on a silken seat,
With plenty to look at and lots to eat?
Oh, Uncle, Uncle, is that the way?’

‘Nay, child, nay.
I’ve told you once, and I tell you again,
You won’t get there if you go by train.’

‘But how shall I travel to Arcadie,
The land where the fairies are?

Should I find the way if I went one day
In a wonderful motor-car ?
In a silver car with a crimson hood
And wheels of velvet and sandalwood,
With a horn that murmurs melodious airs,
And a big green bonnet like Auntie wears ?
Shall I dash in a flash through the purple dusk
To that halcyon land of bliss,
With odorous petrol of myrrh and musk
And roses and ambergris,
And lamps like a tiger's eyes, that blink
And gleam with a basilisk glow :
Would that be a likelier plan, d' you think ?'

' Oh, do what you like, but go !
But I don't mind saying, you won't get far
To Arcadie in a motor-car.'

' But Uncle, Uncle, I wa-ant to know ;
Shall I soar in a big balloon
Like a beautiful shimmering bubble, and—— '

' Oh !

Why don't you try the Moon,
Or the shores where the mermaids dip ?
You'd find out a way to them just as soon.
Young man, you can take my tip :

This quest of yours is a hopeless case,
For there's no such place—there's no such place.'

'But, Uncle——' 'Be quiet, I want to write!'

But you told us about it yourself last night!'

'I didn't. I'm busy. So don't talk trash.'

'But you did!'—'I didn't!'—'You *di-id*!'—'Oh,
dash!

Come hither, you shrimp, to your uncle's knee
And I'll give you a lesson on Arcadie.

There's an exquisite vale in the Isle of Dreams,
A land where it's always cool,
A lazy land, with meandering streams,
And lilies on every pool,
And the meadows are sunny the whole year round,
And quiet the whole day long,
Except for the dove's low croon and the sound
Of a pipe and a tuneful song;
And that is the song the shepherds sing
Of lambs and lovers and lasting Spring.

And the winds are laden with wafted spice,
And the heavens are always blue,
And it's just a poetical paradise,
Which isn't the place for *you* !

A poet's paradise, mark you that !
And, whatever a place might be,
If it harboured a little inquisitive brat,
It wouldn't be Arcadie.

And, now you're satisfied, go to bed ;
If you don't stop crying, I'll smack your head.'

MR. COX

THERE is a pious name, all unrecorded
By the biographers of this proud isle,
A soul whose poignant gifts were not rewarded
By popular applause or noble style,
Yet, 'mongst the lords of Science and Invention,
Oh, more enduring than the basic rocks
Should be the fame of him I'm proud to mention,
The unassuming genius, Mr. Cox.

He lived unknown, as far as one can gather ;
We know him only by his labour's fruits ;
Who's Who did not expend a lot of blather
Upon his wife, his clubs and his pursuits ;
This, to one smaller, might have been depressing,
Not so to him ; alone he chose to live,
Triumphed alone, and won that tardy blessing
Which it is now my privilege to give.

We may not learn what patience he expended
On the life-labours that enrich us now,
How greatly he contrived, how much amended,
What pensive weight oppressed that kingly brow.

Beauty he added to internal sweetness ;
Colour with form he tenderly conjoined ;
And, having wrought the whole to full completeness,
Probably found the profits were purloined.

For did he win to wealth ? I gravely doubt it.
I trow he had no patent for his wares.
Those were around who made no bones about it
But filched his secret, and the gain was theirs.
They learned his lore ; they packed in crates and
boxes
His golden spoil, to swell their ill-won gains ;
One thing alone he had—the name of ‘ Cox’s ’
Clung like a label, and to-day remains.

And now, when all old bonds are being broken,
Sweet Cox, in thee we find a common tie.
Our systems quarrel ; angry words are spoken ;
Mean politics have set the land awry ;
Wealth is at war with envy, church with chapel ;
But this one touch of kinship heals our ranks—
That every true-born Briton loves an apple,
And, for his ‘ Cox’s Orange,’ gives thee thanks.

NATURAL SNOBBERY

IN London's West there stands a square,
The home of rank and dross,
Whereof the goodly mansions wear
The gravest, most superior air
You ever came across.

The very milkman's voice is mute,
While, poised on muffled toes,
The wand'rer stills his ringing boot,
And e'en the taxi's vulgar hoot
More musically flows.

For whoso moves therein will feel
A spell, before he's done,
About his grovelling spirit steal
That bids him doff the tile and kneel—
I always do, for one.

ODD NUMBERS

This afternoon I took my way
Forth in a world of Spring ;
The town was in its best array,
The very air was brave and gay
And fresh as anything.

I marked how blithely spread the scene,
How the bland sun looked down
On trees immaculately clean
In foliage of earliest green,
Unsmutted by the town.

At last I turned, that hallowed spot
In reverence to range,
And there discerned—I knew not what —
Something that struck me like a shot
As different and strange.

The sparkling skies were just as bright,
The selfsame sun did glow ;
No fewer leaves rejoiced the sight ;
Yet somehow—somehow—this was quite
A different kind of show.

I marvelled what the cause might be,
Till in a flash I saw
There was a dulness on the tree,
A grave decorum, which to me
Somehow suggested awe ;

And then I knew ; and I was glad,
For, with a sudden throb,
I felt that I was not so bad,
For Nature, too, was but a cad,
And Spring, like me, a snob.

LINES ON A DEAD BICYCLE

ALTHOUGH I be a thing of waggish cheer
And philosophic habit, little prone
To make much noise, or drop the kindly tear
On any one's affairs except my own,
Yet, were I soulless as a gramophone,
Ah me, ah me,
Still would I weep, this piteous sight to see.

For, mark you, this poor stricken thing has been
The petted darling of some dainty fair ;
Hers was the hand that loved to keep it clean,
Watched it and tended it, and with fond care
Gave it sweet oils, and swiftly would repair
Its slightest hurt
From piercing nail, perchance, or caking dirt.

And oh, what joy, when, with a favouring gale,
Lightly they skimmed the land, these happy twain ;
Up hill, down dale, especially down dale,
Although quite decent hills they would attain,

Unless the lady, finding it a strain,
 Began to puff,
 And got off, feeling that she'd had enough.

A gallant time, but all too quickly changed
 And sadly. It was ever woman's whim
 To leave the thing she loves and grow estranged.
 Perhaps she found the early gloss grow dim,
 Or, haply, yearned toward some newer 'jim'
 Which this poor steed
 Lacked, and till then had never known the need.

All this we know not. Only we expect
 The lady grew indifferent, ceased to tend
 Her charge, for with indifference comes neglect.
 The care became a nuisance, and the friend
 An ever-growing bore; and, in the end,
 The lady got
 Rid of it somehow—how, it matters not.

And now 'tis dead. Its end was swift and kind,
 More kind than life. With wild and frenzied leap
 A mad 'bus sprang upon it from behind
 And knocked it endways to its last long sleep.
 And now, about a crushed and mangled heap
 The hushed crowds throng
 While sad policemen bid them pass along.

Pass to thy rest, poor bike ! Thy task is done.
Alone thou aged'st and alone hast died.
Thy rider saw the peril—wretched one !—
Thought not of saving thee, but to one side
Leapt with a squeal whereat calm taxis shied.
She's in a swoon
Just now, but she'll be sorry for it soon.

A LEAP YEAR QUESTION

I'M in really a remarkable quandary,
A dilemma unexperienced before ;
It's a case in which I have to be particularly wary
Lest I do what I might afterwards deplore ;
And, although the breach of confidence is much
against the grain,
With permission, I'll endeavour to explain.

There's a lady who has gloriously taken
The advantage that the present year confers
By proposing, with a force that one can hardly read
unshaken,
To—excuse me if I blush—to make me hers.
As my own attempts at marriage have been very
much amiss,
I should like to ask you what you think of this.

She's a person of most excellent endowment,
If she's hardly the ideal of one's dream ;
And, you'll understand, although I'm undecided for
the moment,
She's a lady whom to know is to esteem.
I may add that, with a fervour one would hardly like
to damp,
She encloses me an envelope and stamp.

To accept, decline, refer her to my mother,
Would of course provide an answer, ay or nay ;
But an awkwardness arises from the fact that there's
another,
And I'm troubled as to what I ought to say ;
As a fact, the other lady hasn't made the least advance,
But I'd like to wait and give her every chance.

For I love her. With an ever-growing hunger
I have found her ever sweet, but often cold ;
It's undoubtedly the case that she's considerably
younger
And may look on me as elderly or 'old' !
And, indeed, it's on the cards that, if acquainted
with the fact
Of my passion, she might think that I was cracked.

O my lady, I am hopeless, I am silly, oh,
I may be all that isn't to your taste,
But I love you, O my ladylove, I worship you like—
billy-oh

Appeals to me as accurate and chaste ;
But—to finish the apostrophe—the lady doesn't speak,
For she lacks the inclination, or the cheek.

So you see it. There's a claim, which seems the
stronger,

From a maiden whom there's much to recommend ;
And perhaps it isn't prudent to be waiting any longer
With my youth and beauty drawing to an end ;
While you can't postpone an answer to the distant
by-and-by

When a lady sends a stamp for a reply.

Yet the Other, who's away, if she were willing,
If that Other, whom just now I can't get at,
Were to love me—and she may—oh, that would
simply be too killing ;

O my readers, what a tragedy were that !
Yet, suppose I found she didn't, it would mean a
heavy loss ;
To the gods I give the matter. I shall toss.

THE CORONATION CHAIR

HAPPY the bard, and privileged his lot,

Who finds some hallowed thing before his eyes
Whence the most torpid brain (which mine is not)
Rises to new thoughts which, with warm surprise,

He feels instinctively are good and wise ;
These are the themes by poets held most dear ;
Of such are poems made ; and such, methinks, is here.

Yes, 'tis a sight no loyal eye may view
Without emotion ; here the gaze is fed
With the great Stone of Scone (pronounce it *oo*),
Brought from old Palestine, whereon, 'tis said,
Tired JACOB rested his nomadic head.
A fine thought this ; let cavillers assert
The thing is new Scotch sandstone—what are they
but dirt ?

But to the Chair. The casual regard
Might hold it for its office all unmeet ;
Hewn of the callous oak it is, and hard,
And unresponsive to the royal seat ;
Yet, with a stern composure bad to beat,
From our first EDWARD, England's kings have sat
Here, and have here been crowned ; and what d' you
make of that ?

Bethink you what the chronicle relates
Of those great souls, long laid on history's shelf ;
Try to imagine (never mind the dates)
All their proud line, from Norman down to
Guelph ;
For me, my wandering dream confines itself,
Somehow, to stout QUEEN BESS ; full well I ween
Good heed the prelate took who crowned that hasty
Queen.

They come, as in a mist they go ; and thus
The contemplative mind must needs recall
How surely waits the dark *Mors Omnibus*,
Looming ahead, alike for great and small.
A sombre lesson this, if this were all !
But look again ; look closelier yet, and read ;
Can those be letters ? Yes. And names ? They
are, indeed.

O ye unknown, that have, in ages back,
 Carved on the seat of kingship each his name
Or his initials, thus with happy knack
 Making a bold, pathetic bid for fame,
 Now after long days ye achieve your aim ;
Not to the kings, ye meaner, but to ye
The minstrel turns his muse in clear apostrophe.

Not yours the royal diadem to wear ;
 Your state was humble as your manners low ;
Yet, as we view this Coronation Chair,
 Out of the mind all kingly visions go—
 They fade, they perish ; only we may know
Your simple toils ; only the sense is gript
By these rude names of yours, rough-hewn in clumsy
 script.

•

WEARY POULTRY

[The young people of a certain small commune have been accustomed to meet for the purpose of dancing and merry-making. It has been officially declared that 'the noise they make frightens the cocks and hens of the village,' and dancing has been prohibited 'during the hours in which the domestic animals take their repose.']

LADS and lassies, you that nightly
Gather to the nimble flute,
There to trip it, not too lightly,
On the broad, fantastic boot,
Couples who with clumsy frolic
Well-nigh shake the groaning floor,
While the noise of your bucolic
Laughter stays the local snore ;

Hushed is now that simple pleasure ;
Nevermore when hours are dark
Shall you tread the artless measure
Or indulge the rural lark ;

ODD NUMBERS

Not to man it greatly mattered,
But the weary cocks and hens
Find their constitutions shattered
By your large-sized 8's and 10's.

Chanticleer the early morning
Once proclaimed with clarion bray,
Giving all the village warning
Of the coming work-a-day ;
Then the hours he kept were early ;
Now awake till prime of dawn
He feels far too slack and surly
To do anything but yawn.

Dorcas, too, the mother's model,
Once upraised a piercing screech
When she saw her small ones toddle
For one moment out of reach ;
Now she lets them roam neglected,
Careless, though the worst may hap,
While she gives an unaffected
Stretch and takes a midday nap.

Now, again, the ready layers
Wander dull and heavy-eyed,
And, from being one-a-dayers,
Calmly let the whole thing slide ;

While the sitter grows so jumpy
That she leaps, all wings and legs,
At a whisper, from her lumpy,
Seat of chilled and ruined eggs.

So do all forsake their uses.
Pullets, thin as any ghost,
Find their dried and sapless juices
Quite unfit them for the roast ;
And, in short, where all was cheerful,
Loud with honest cluck and crow,
Dark Insomnia stalks with fearful
Gait and lays the poultry low.

Wherefore, be your rustic dances
All suspended through the night ;
In the given circumstances,
Best, perhaps, suspend them quite.
If temptations come, resist 'em ;
Knowing this, ye soulless boors,
Poultry have a nervous system
Far more delicate than yours.

A CENTENARY OF PROGRESS

(Trousers were first introduced a hundred years ago.)

A HUNDRED years ago. It is not mine
To sing, as others of my species may,
Of some high beacon that arose to shine
And dazzle future history. Truth to say,
Historical research is not my line,
Nor do I need it. My superior lay
Thrills to no great fight won or great king born—
I sing the year when trousers first were worn.

Small chance, until this great refreshment came,
Had any man. Whate'er his views might be,
The bifurcations on his nether frame
Ended too surely somewhere near the knee.
Whether he had a soul attuned to shame,
Or one from such refinement nobly free,
He must betray, to women and to men,
His utmost self. 'Twas legs or nothing then.

But all was changed. And meagre man could hide
His spindly weakness from the vulgar's chaff,
While even he who took a buxom pride
In the orb'd turning of a conscious calf
Saw a new comfort not to be denied
In this strange gear ; and, having come to laugh,
Remained to don, and won by slow degrees
A nascent modesty with this new ease.

And thus it chanced that, where the spell was cast,
Virtues beyond mere coyness grew apace—
For out of one come many—till at last
A mild urbanity assumed the place,
Of the swashbuckling swagger of the past ;
The West grew kindlier ; and each trousered race,
Full of new worth, looks back, and finds it grow
From that great change, a hundred years ago.

And thou, O nameless One, that didst invent
These gentle togs, to be for future days
A tool of Progress and an instrument
Of Peace, accept our full centennial praise.
Nor does the poet grudge the time he's spent
On this his ode (providing someone pays)
In memory of him who wrought this boon,
Which still endures, and shall not wither soon.

A hundred years. It seems how long to us ;
And yet what is it in the cosmic view ?
A fleeting penn'orth on an old-world 'bus ;
And we ourselves, how paltry and how new ;
It would be well to shun vainglorious fuss,
And ponder, while these lendings we indue,
How, in the immemorial Eastern clime,
Women have worn them from the birth of Time.

•

A KERCHIEF

To me it comes—so frail and fine—
A laundry-hand, with some divine
Impulse, has packed the thing with mine—
 A pretty blunder—
A dainty thing of lawn and lace
Such as a maid with easy grace
Withdraws from some mysterious place
 Which makes men wonder.

It bears a monogram, a J. ;
Who knows what name it might convey,
Judith or Julia, shall we say,
 Jeannette or Jenny ?
We may not hope to ascertain ;
We cannot make the mystery plain ;
It might be Joan ; it wasn't Jane,
 I'll bet a penny.

That were a name too hard to bear
By one who, I'm prepared to swear,
Was trim and delicate and fair,

A thing of beauty ;

Methinks she grows before my eyes ,
I see her shape, I recognise
Her nose, a thing of slender size
And very fluty.

I see her with her kerchief grasp
That member with a tender clasp,
Finger and thumb—a gentle gasp—

And then, how sweetly

Out on the air there seems to float
So soft, so musical a note
That it would make the blackbird's throat
Dry up completely

Perchance some youth is standing near
Who listens with enraptured ear,
Yet trusts the cold is not severe.

Ah, foolish lover !

He may be sure that she's all right ;
That with catarrh however slight
Maids with complexions shun the light
Till they recover.

O lady, lady fair and sweet,
Dear maid, whom I could wish to meet,
I wonder if, to make complete

 Your weekly docket,
They sent you aught of mine—a wipe
Virile and masculine of type
Scented with carrying a pipe
 In my breast-pocket.

Dear Mistress Anything but Jane
I should be proud if you 'd retain
The trophy : but, if you disdain
 The smell of baccy,
Then, as I have a present lack,
Perhaps you 'll kindly send it back
(The J., in my case, stands for Jack,
 Or sometimes Jacky).

WITHOUT PREJUDICE

DEAR, you have the daintiest of hair
 (Anyway, you had when first I knew it),
But I 'm bound to say I do not care
 For the present way in which you do it.
ETHEL, tho' she's plainer, I confess,
Sticks to a becoming waviness ;
Even if the fashion isn't ' new,'
ETHEL always does it—why don't you ?

Dear, those little ears are very pink,
 Very delicate, and very pretty ;
Being as they are, then, don't you think
 Putting earrings in them seems a pity ?
MARY, though inferior in looks,
Never wears those idiotic hooks ;
Even if it is the ' thing to do '
MARY doesn't do it—why do you ?

Some, no doubt, derive an added grace

From a head that's touzled, burnt, and crimply,
But a girl that *has* an angel's face

Ought to frame it *like* an angel's—simply.
Dear, the glitter of a jewel dies
In the glory of a maiden's eyes ;
Never mind the fashions of the day ;
Look at EFFIE, dearest ! Look at MAY !

MUTED

ONCE in the dear dead days for ever gone,
When after-dinner songsters were in boom,
First of our local bachelors I shone
The vocal star of many a drawing-room.
My life was fair, my lot was well-contented ;
Raised to a mellow status all my own,
I was admired, till somebody invented
That ruinous machine, the Gramophone.

Yes, in those flush and prospering times of yore
Oft'ner than not I had my victuals free,
Dined rarely at my own expense—what 's more,
Could frequently economise in tea.
The empty stomach loved of men of leading
I waived without a murmur ; for my part,
I sang my finest after hearty feeding,
But mine was nature, theirs was only art.

Yet think not that I scrupled to enlist
Art to my needs ; I had, when I began,
Twelve lessons from our local organist
(And twelve should be enough for any man) ;
'Twas he indeed that gave me skill to render
Shop-ballads with apparent grace and ease ;
Sad songs, with a refrain to make them tender,
And published, as a rule, in several keys.

Ah, blessed songs ! I sang them by the sheet ;
Sang them in fullest measure, as implored
By many a dame whose feast was incomplete
Save for this voice which all her friends adored.
Bright was the present, and the future sunny ;
Indeed, had things continued as they were,
It was supposed that I should marry money,
So popular was I among the fair.

But now, alas, how dark is my eclipse ;
My ample jaws are sealed, and in their place
Yawns a colossal trumpet, from whose lips
Stentorian tenor vies with bull-voiced bass.
Bleating like goats or bellowing like thunder,
Now that in every home the echoes ring
With disky records of the great, what wonder
That amateurs are not allowed to sing ?

And thus my social vogue has gone. To-day
Rarely the hostess bids me to the feast ;
The local maidens pass me on the way
As tho' they'd never loved me in the least ;
And—heaviest pang of all—when after dinner,
I take my lonely stroll, or sit alone,
Borne on the breeze I hear, as I'm a sinner,
My own shop-ballads—on a Gramophone.

A LAUNDRY PROBLEM

O LAUNDRESS—though a cold machine
Of bloodless I.H.P.,¹
You still are, as you long have been,
All woman unto me—

I greet you, not with empty cheer
Or words of hollow praise,
But seeking, after many a year,
The purpose of your ways.

I ask not why you always fall
On everything that's new
And damage it beyond recall;
For, though of course you do,

It is an old and classic wrong;
And howsoe'er they weep,
Men learn to suffer and be strong
And buy their linen cheap.

¹ Indicated horse-power.

Nor is it that you love to ram
The starch in every part
That should be softer than a lamb,
Not harder than your heart ;

Nor why the names we deftly mark
Should rouse a fearful hate
That seems to make the whole world dark,
Till you obliterate.

These mysteries, and many more,
Though maddening, are trite ;
The world has searched them oft before,
Yet never found the light.

But there is one thing still more strange,
A graver, deeper, care
That thrills my soul, whene'er I 'change,'
With ever-new despair.

On this I muse, O silent one,
Till I am nigh to drop :—
When all your dreadful task is done,
Why do you go and button everything up to the very top?

AN INSTALLATION

FAIR Mystery, and here at last thou art.

Much have I sighed for thee in this high den
Wherein at intervals I sit apart

Driving a hard but fairly rhythmic pen.
O thou that with thy soft and whispering tone
Bringst me the commune of my fellow-men
When I am bored and weary of my own,
I give thee cheer, glad cheer, my Telephone.

Yes, I have sighed for thee. In that dull mood
That breaks upon the stubborn quest of rhyme,
Oft I have yearned for some one to intrude
Upon my loneliness—not waste my time,
But cheer me with sweet converse, and begone,
Leaving me my Parnassian heights to climb ;
Not like the well-beloved but tactless John,
Who ruins all because he will stay on.

But now henceforth that genial soul may be
Mine in a moment (and cut off at will) ;
I summon George ; a voice responds ; 'tis he :
I would have speech with Thomas or with Bill ;
They answer : nay, the greatest of the town
Are at my call, those barren moods to fill ;
A stirring thought, that for one trifling brown
I may almost ring up the very Crown

Nay, there is better. Take, for instance, Jones ;
Jones, as a comrade, has no parallel ,
His wit is Attic, his mellifluous tones
Are, in their timbre, suggestive of a bell
Strange, is it not, that with such vocal grace
His countenance can make you quite unwell ?
'Twere sweet to have my Jones about the place ,
In all his charm, without that silly face.

And there is she. Henceforth for ever near,
Maiden, all coyly on this wavering line
I will breathe nothings in your shell-like ear,
You will, no doubt, breathe nothings into mine.
Oh, this is wondrous, truly this is great !
O magic Telephone, what powers are thine,
That can unite true lovers, and abate
The toils of letter-writing, which I hate.

TO A HAIRPIN

O PIN that didst of yore constrain
Some lady's would-be wanton mane
 With dear enslavement,
Till wind or luck, rude autocrat,
Expelled thee from that maiden's mat
 On to the pavement,

What story hast thou? Was the head
Thou tired'st hazel, black or red,
 Gold or peroxide?
Had it a parting? Did it wave?
Was it in mode demure and suave,
 Or on the shock side?

Didst thou, with hidden guile, attach
Some cunning tresses bought 'to match,'
 To hide a lacking?
We can but trust, if that be so,
The hair hung on, despite the blow
 That sent thee packing.

Ah me ! no doubt a deal of care
Was spent to bring that head of hair
 To full perfection ;
We wonder if, for all her toil,
That tragedy went far to spoil
 The whole erection.

It may be ; for that man, indeed,
Who begs, to serve his direst need,
 A pin—a hair one—
To clean his pipe, is ever met
With hackneyed statements of regret
 That ‘ she can’t spare one.’

O hairpin cast upon the earth,
’Tis not for man to ask thy worth
 Or probe thy history ;
He only knows that, being one
By which a lady’s hair is ‘ done,’
 Thou art all mystery.

But, lowly though thy present state,
Thou hast for memory this great
 And deathless blessing.
That thou—O joy beyond eclipse !—
Didst lie between a maiden’s lips
 When she was dressing.

LINES ON SEEING SOME CORONETS
DISPLAYED IN A SHOP WINDOW

MOST radiant mysteries, that do engird
The lordly crumpets of the Upper Ten,
You that at last are openly preferred
Before the awe-struck gaze of common men,
That seldom greet the air
Save in the hallowed precincts of Big Ben,
Much have I longed to know you as you were,
Nor dreamed to find you so entrancing and so fair.

For you are ever awfully remote.
Oft have I seen you on the bellying side
Of some barouche, and, stooping, paused to gloat—
Braving the flunkey's supercilious pride—
To stand, with low-doffed hat,
To look my fill, yet not be satisfied ;
'Twas an abiding joy to gaze thereat,
And yet, compared with this, how paltry and how flat.

For you are beautiful beyond all dream,
And in all detail admirably graced ;
Yon ermine, how it helps the general scheme ;
Those silvern orbs, how elegant in taste ;
Yon cap (if cap it be)
Of ruddiest crimson, how extremely chaste ;
These with their golden circlet blend, ah me,
To a harmonious whole I had not thought to see.

And you, O peers, that from your chariot wheels
Spatter my trouserings with London's mire,
Whose nose of purest aquiline reveals,
For the low herd that write themselves Esquire,
A bland and high disdain
So great that some, with wormy souls afire
(Being annoyed), have thrilled and thrilled again
With thoughts it ill befits the meek to entertain,

I, too, have murmured at you heretofore,
But not so now ; that you condemn the crowd
Pains me, but it surprises me no more.
He that has been so spaciouly endowed
Were but a blithering ass
To ape humility and not be proud,
Knowing how justly he must needs surpass
All of us meaner flesh that are, at best, but grass.

LINES ON SEEING SOME CORONETS 75

Nay, there is more. Time was, I would pretend
To view you with a self-defensive scorn
(Poor mockery !)—that, too, is at an end ;
To-day I feel strange itchings, newly-born,
Myself to be a peer,
If the good gods might so exalt my horn ;
Only to own these gauds of stately cheer,
Even tho' packed away, methinks were passing dear.

Yet, no. God-gifted tho' you be and blest,
Let me retain my poor and meagre lot ;
'Tis true no glittering bauble gilds my crest,
But you, that have the same, may wear it not.
I, being low in style,
Am well content with hats—the simple pot ;
But you, O lordings, truly it were vile
To own a coronet, and have to wear a tile.

•

ERGOPHOBIA

IT was not that I wished to go away,
 To leave my tasks undone, and wander free ;
My noble spirit chafed at the delay,
For work (whatever my detractors say)
 Is meat and drink to me.

The joys of idleness allured me not ;
 Indeed, I felt considerable pain
At being torn, uprooted from the spot
Where I might work, and give full vent to what
 I wildly call my brain.

I did but seek the somewhat flagging power
 Of that tremendous engine to restore ;
I said, I will be idle for an hour,
Give it, in fact, a kind of thorough scour,
 That I may work the more.

It was in that fine hope that I took wing,
For that I laid my well-loved labours by ;
And, faring forth, I grew the sunniest thing ;
I was a figure of incarnate Spring ;
None bonnier than I.

Where'er I moved I carolled like a lark ;
On lake, on links, the music of my mirth
Became the theme of general remark ;
Yet ever, tho' I strove to keep it dark
From men of lighter worth,

In mind I sought that fuller time ahead
When I should leave ignoble rest behind
And tackle that dear work for which I bled
(Being, I fancy I've already said,
Blest with that sort of mind).

So the days passed. And so the glad dawn broke
That hailed me to the labour of my Art.
With joy I came ; with joy resumed the yoke ;
And up till now I haven't done a stroke—
I cannot even start.

My Muse, once supple, labours as a wain
That deeply creaks in unaccustomed ruts
(A pretty figure !); struggles are in vain ;
And, as for what I madly call my brain,
It doesn't act for nuts.

Nay, worse. My old-time zeal has run to rust ;
And work—a fact that fills me with dismay—
That very work, for which I felt such lust,
Makes me recoil with shuddering disgust ;
I want to go away.

THE POET AND THE BURGLAR

THE POET AND THE BURGLAR

THERE was music in the silent summer night-time ;
There was music stealing lightly o'er the land ;
Not the music that is heard
From the music-loving bird,
But the mellow, mellow music of a band.

From a large suburban pleasance it was wafted ;
And suggested in its never-dying fall
That the owner of the mansion
In a moment of expansion
Was the hospitable giver of a ball.

To that eligible residential suburb
With a newly netted fortune he had come ;
(Like the legendary HORNER,
He had got into a 'corner,'
And extracted a considerable 'plum').

Having purchased a colossal habitation,
And equipped it with a grandeur that arose
From the principle of blowing
The expenditure, and showing
That, like TODGERS, he could do it when he
chose,

He had bidden all his wealthier acquaintance
To an orgie of the light fantastic toe,
Not so much to entertain them,
As to dazzle them, and pain them,
With the unexampled splendour of the show.

There were fountains, there were flunkies, and
exotics ;
There was luxury, a marvel to behold ;
Every cornice of the building
Was a solid mass of gilding,
And the services were eighteen-carat gold.

And the glory of the night was at its highest ;
And the guests were satisfactorily lost
In outspoken admiration
At his noble ostentation,
And in *sotto voce* comments on the cost.

But to him, alas, the victory was lacking ;
For he knew that, in the fulness of his aim,
He had most of all depended
For his triumph on the splendid
Overpow'ring apparition of his dame.

He had plastered her with jewels like an idol ;
For an acreage of shoulder, and a bust
Of exceptionally full size
There were gems as big as bulls' eyes,
Which would fill a *prima donna* with disgust.

But that oriental panoply was wasted ;
On a table it was lying overhead ;
For his lady-wife, when dressing,
Had been struck with a distressing
Fit of megrims, and had taken to her bed.

And the music rose and fell in soft persistence ;
But the revellers around him little guessed
At the fly within his ointment,
At his bitter disappointment,
And the anguish in his hospitable breast.

* * * * *

Close behind that lordly mansion, in a garret bare
and cheap,

Sat a silent summer poet, brooding on his ravished
sleep.

Very meagre was the poet ; he had early sought his
bed,

Hoping to forget in slumber what he ate when last
he fed.

Roused by that infernal music, he arose and crossed
the room,

Gazed upon the rich man's garden, lying in its
moonless gloom ,

Far away the lanterns twinkled , 'neath his eyrie all
was black ,

For his dark and gloomy window only overlooked
the back.

With a fine imagination quickened by an empty
maw,

He could sense those airy revels till he almost
thought he saw ;

THE POET AND THE BURGLAR 85

Saw the myriad jewels flashing ; felt a pang beneath
his belt

At the fragrance of a supper that he practically
smelt.

‘ Out upon the fates,’ he muttered, ‘ this indeed is
pretty hard ;

He, a stout but footless huckster, I, a bare but brainy
bard ,

What am I that I should hunger ? What is he, that
he should swell

Fatly on a feast that goads me with the phantom of
a smell ?

Out upon these moneyed upstarts ! Is there one of
all the gang

That would squander three and sixpence (net) to
save a poet’s pang ?

None, so far as I’ve discovered.’ Here he paused to
drop a tear

On the boom which, given money, he could surely
engineer.

Growing still more socialistic, once again the poet
spake :

‘Oh, that I were born a Robber ! Would that I
were trained to take !

Quickly would I share those shekels ; would that I
had spent my time

On the technical requirements for the higher walks
of Crime !’

Still the music swayed and eddied ; still, with ever-
growing ire,

Biliously the poet mourned the lack of foresight in
his sire ;

Mourned his wasted education ; mourned—but gave
a sudden jump,

As a form came slinking, slinking, round a rhododen-
dron clump.

* * * * *

Crouching low where the shade was deepest, gliding
over the clearer spaces,

Palpably keen on avoiding notice, silent, shadowy,
swift, and slim,

THE POET AND THE BURGLAR 87

Soft as a panther pursuing a monkey, quick as a
flicker in marshy places,
Came the first of the cracksmen's calling, entered
Gentleman JAMES (or JIM).

Gentleman (*lucus a non lucendo*) JAMES or JIM was a
man of some mark ;
Unsuspected and undefeated, long he had driven a
thriving trade :
Never a peeler had caught him tripping, never a
copper had seen his thumbmark ;
Due in part to superior wits, in part to professional
gloves of suede.

Little he recked of the golden plate, for well he knew
that a dark detective
Glow'ed and gloomed (in a flunkey's breeches)
over the board where the feast was spread ;
Rather he welcomed the clumsy presence, as leaving
open his true objective,
All those glimmering, shimmering shiners left
unwatched in a room o'erhead.

Rubies rich with the blood of ages, sea-blue sapphire,
and deep carbuncle,
Diamond, amethyst, pearl of the orient, emerald
green as a tiger's eye,
All were there for the sportsman's hand to pass along
to his fence (or uncle);
Portable, priceless, all were ready, the hour had
come, and the man was nigh.

Long he had sworn to possess those shiners, only he
waited the due occasion;
Bolts, and bars, and a patent safe, are not such
trifles as one might think;
Came the ball, and the gems were out, and (after
some gentlemanlike persuasion)
MARY, maid of the robes, had promised to dope
her mistress's evening drink.

Out of the shrubbery slinking, slinking, stooping low
in his coy effacement,
Soft as a swallow evading a vulture, quick as a cat
from a house in flames,

Up by a rope in a darkened corner, into the house
through a backstair casement,
Out of the poet's vision vanished the person of
Gentleman JIM (or JAMES).

* * * * *

He came again anon.
From his high lair,
With cold, lacklustre air,
The bard looked on.

He saw the wary Gent.,
Scorning pursuit,
Retire with bulging loot.
And, as he went,

Over the poet's gloom
A sudden scheme
Flashed ; and, as in a dream,
He crossed the room.

He donned his silent shoes
And a drear cape
Of dark dissembling shape,
As poets use,

In which he wrapped him round.

Also he took
From a small shelf a book
In vellum bound,

Wherein he subtly penned
‘ These, with the bard’s
Extremely kind regards,
To his dear friend.’

Then, with a shapeless tile
Upon his crest,
Smiling away the while,
Like one possessed,

With furtive step and light,
Now slow, now fast,
On tip of toe,
Into the aching night
The poet passed.
What ho !

THE POET AND THE BURGLAR 91

Home, with never a backward glance, the Gentleman
sauntered, whistling brightly,
Never a thought of a shape behind that crept as a
leopard that stalks his prey ;
Never a sound disturbed his dreams of a shadowy
form that lightly, lightly,
Soft as a well-bred ghost to his chamber crept,
and stole, like a ghost, away.

Deep in sleep till the morn he lay, and, lazily
waking, he laughed like winking,
Laughed as he thought how the dark detective
glow'ed and gloomed where the need was nil ;
Laughed as he wondered in airy sport what Scotland
Yard and the world were thinking ;
Never, he reckoned, had crib been cracked with a
finer art and a greater skill.

He was the cream and the crown of cracksmen ; he
the lord of the Art of Burgling ;
He alone was the undefeated, his the hand that
would leave no clue ;

He alone could have won this fortune ;—here he
arose, and, inly gurgling,
Put on his slippers, and crossed the room—and
went to look his boodle through.

* * * * *

Suddenly a roar of anguish rumbled,
Throbbing, from the Gentleman's abode.
Much excited, all the neighbours tumbled
In confusion, out into the road.

Thinking some one must be in a poor way,
In they rushed, and, guided by the din,
Stood in huddled horror in the doorway,
Staggered by the spectacle within.

Wild of eye, with every hair up-ended,
Holding in his quivering hand a book,
Much as if he mutely recommended
One or two of them to have a look,

There before their horror-stricken glances
Stood the Gentleman. At last he woke,
Tore the book to shreds, and did some dances
Madly on the fragments ere he spoke.

Then at last his sorrows found expression ;
And, with both hands tugging his coiffure,
'Bilked !' he cried, 'the Pride of my Profession,
Bilked ! And by a blooming amatoor !'

